

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. – 10. (Canceled)

11. (Currently amended) A ~~n~~-exopolysaccharide fermentation broth obtained produced by a process comprising:

culturing a *Sphingomonas* bacteria selected from the group consisting of ATCC PTA-3487, ATCC PTA-3486, ATCC PTA-3485, ATCC PTA-3488, and mixtures thereof ~~in a fermentation broth~~ for a time and temperature effective for providing a broth from which a sphingan exopolysaccharide in a slime form can be recovered; and

~~recovering the sphingan exopolysaccharide from the fermentation broth~~ with an alcohol precipitation method at a temperature of about 25°C to about 50°C,

wherein the method ~~is effective for providing yields~~ at least about 10 grams of sphingan exopolysaccharide per liter of broth.

12. (Currently amended) An ~~exopolysaccharide~~ fermentation broth according to claim 11 wherein fermentation is conducted from about 48 to about 96 hours at a temperature of about 25°C to about 35°C.

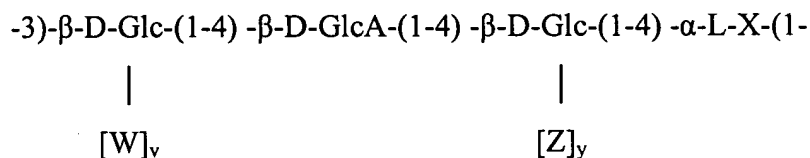
13. (Currently amended) A fermentation broth ~~exopolysaccharide~~ according to claim 11 wherein in the alcohol precipitation method from about 1 to about 1.5 volumes of alcohol are added to the fermentation broth.

14. (Canceled)

15. (Currently amended) A fermentation broth comprising slime-forming *Sphingomonas* bacterial cells and an exopolysaccharide in a slime form, wherein the exopolysaccharide is produced by a *Sphingomonas* bacterium can be recovered from said fermentation broth by alcohol precipitation at a temperature of about 25°C to about 50°C to yield at least about 10 grams of exopolysaccharide per liter of broth.

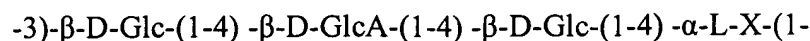
16. (Currently amended) ~~An exopolysaccharide in a slime form~~ fermentation broth according to claim 15 wherein the ~~exopolysaccharide in slime form is produced by~~ *Sphingomonas* is selected from the group consisting of ATCC PTA-3487, ATCC PTA-3486, ATCC PTA-3485, ATCC PTA-3488, and mixtures thereof.

17. (Currently amended) ~~A fermentation broth~~ ~~exopolysaccharide in a slime form~~ according to claim 15 wherein the exopolysaccharide in slime form is a sphingane exopolysaccharide having the general formula



wherein Glc is glucose, GlcA is glucuronic acid or 2-deoxy-glucuronic acid, Rha is rhamnose, Man is mannose, X is Rha or Man, Z is attached to Glc residue 2 and is α -L-Rha-(1-4)- α -L-Rha, α -L-Man or α -L-Rha, W is attached to Glc residue number 1 and is β -D-Glc-(1-6)- α -D-Glc, β -D-Glc-(1-6)- β -D-Glc or α -L-Rha, subscripts v and y are 0, 0.33, 0.5, 0.67 or 1.

18. (Currently amended) A fermentation broth comprising slime-forming *Sphingomonas* bacterial cells and an exopolysaccharide in a slime form having the general formula



|
[W]_v

|
[Z]_y

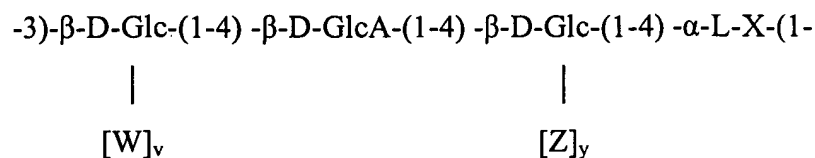
wherein Glc is glucose, GlcA is glucuronic acid or 2-deoxy-glucuronic acid, Rha is rhamnose, Man is mannose, X is Rha or Man, Z is attached to Glc residue 2 and is α -L-Rha-(1-4)- α -L-Rha, α -L-Man or α -L-Rha, W is attached to Glc residue number 1 and is β -D-Glc-(1-6)- α -D-Glc, β -D-Glc-(1-6)- β -D-Glc or α -L-Rha, subscripts v and y are 0, 0.33, 0.5, 0.67 or 1, and wherein the fermentation broth has at least about 1% w/v exopolysaccharide and a viscosity of not more than about 25,000 cp.

19. (Currently amended) An exopolysaccharide in a slime form fermentation broth according to claim 18 wherein the ~~exopolysaccharide in slime form is produced by~~ *Sphingomonas* is selected from the group consisting of ATCC PTA-3487, ATCC PTA-3486, ATCC PTA-3485, ATCC PTA-3488, and mixtures thereof.

20. (Currently amended) A fermentation broth comprising slime-forming *Sphingomonas* bacteria and an exopolysaccharide in a slime form produced by a—the *Sphingomonas* bacteria, wherein the *Sphingomonas* bacteria are grown in a submerged, aerated liquid culture, and wherein a concentration of dissolved oxygen exceeds about 5% of saturation of water after 24 hours of culturing.

21. (Currently amended) A n-exopolysaccharide in a slime form fermentation broth according to claim 20 wherein the exopolysaccharide in slime form is produced by *Sphingomonas* selected from the group consisting of ATCC PTA-3487, ATCC PTA-3486, ATCC PTA-3485, ATCC PTA-3488, and mixtures thereof.

22. (Currently amended) An exopolysaccharide in a slime form fermentation broth according to claim 21 wherein the exopolysaccharide in slime form is a sphinganolipid having the general formula



wherein Glc is glucose, GlcA is glucuronic acid or 2-deoxy-glucuronic acid, Rha is Rhamnose, Man is mannose, X is Rha or Man, Z is attached to Glc residue 2 and is $\alpha\text{-L-Rha-(1-4)-}\alpha\text{-L-Rha}$, $\alpha\text{-L-Man}$ or $\alpha\text{-L-Rha}$, W is attached to Glc residue number 1 and is $\beta\text{-D-Glc-(1-6)-}\alpha\text{-D-Glc}$, $\beta\text{-D-Glc-(1-6)-}\beta\text{-D-Glc}$ or $\alpha\text{-L-Rha}$, subscripts v and y are 0, 0.33, 0.5, 0.67 or 1.

23. (Currently amended) The fermentation broth of claim 15 wherein the exopolysaccharide of ~~claim 15~~ is selected from the group consisting of gellan, welan, rhamnan, S-88, S-7, S-198, NW-11 and S-657.

24. (Currently amended) The fermentation broth ~~exopolysaccharide of claim 23~~ wherein the exopolysaccharide is selected from the group consisting of gellan, welan, S-7 and S-88.

BEST AVAILABLE COPY